Interview with [P16]

P = Participant at case study institution

The following conventions are used in transcription of spoken interviews:

[replacement information in square brackets]

[redacted information in grey in square brackets]

[?] = unintelligible missing word(s); immediately following word = unclear[?]

[#] = redacted numerical information

CAPITALS to signify emphasis in speaking

((Extraneous information in double brackets))

Researcher  
OK, so thank you so much for participating. We're really happy to have your input on this and-

[P16]  
Well, it's it's, it's interesting. As I say, as I said, I think in in the message before. I think it's it's, you know, very limited what I can remember about my experience.

Researcher  
Don't worry about that.

[P16]  
But it DOES relate quite well, you know, to some of the other things.

Researcher  
Yeah. Um just just to recap or just to say a little bit about the project AGAIN. So we're basically looking at how English is becoming increasingly used for academic programs at European universities and we're exploring the kind of the reasons for that use. So we started in the Netherlands because they were quite EARLY implementers of English language programs. I've been looking at Austria. Now I'm kind of looking at Spain and a couple of other people are looking at other places. So, we're trying to get lots of data from different countries in Europe, and we're exploring it from a slightly different angle to what is typically done within OUR field at any rate. So we're looking also at governance and steering at a distance, um things like that. So that's why you're such a super person to talk to.

[P16]

((Chuckling)) Yeah.

Researcher:

So yeah, are you okay if we just get going? I um I had a little-

[P16]  
Yeah. Let me just mention one, one little bit of you know data if you like for you, you, you you mentioned Netherlands.

Researcher  
Yeah.

[P16]  
And I mean, a few years back, I I did quite a lot of work at the [university in Netherlands] um where there is a [unit name], and I did projects with them and so on. However, THAT'S not the relevant point. The relevant point is, you know on the on the here and now is that um I AM actually currently working with an academic in at the [university in Netherlands]. We we we just put in a a proposal for some research funding. But the interesting thing is is that she is from the Ukraine. I got to know her when she was working for [organisation] in [city in France]. And during the pandemic, she went back to the Ukraine. Um and was there when the Russians invaded and took OVER. She escaped to Poland initially and then she moved over to the Netherlands and has got herself a job at the [university in Netherlands].

[P16]  
Uh and she, and I DID actually raise the question for her, you know, I mean, you know, just sort of, you know, at [university in Netherlands], you know, the did did she speak Dutch, you know ((laughing)), and of course not, you know, um, you know, it was clearly a silly question to ask, you know, because, you know, at the [university in Netherlands] nearly everything's in English, you know, and you know, THAT in a sense, you know, relates generally to my experiences. I mean um a project that I'm doing at the moment is a well, it's a comparative project. It it, it's Spain, [European country], [European country] and the UK. Umm, I'm actually working with the the the Spanish um [redacted identifying information] team on it, you know, RATHER than the UK one which is, you know, a bit strange, I suppose. But EQUALLY, you know, you know, I've had sort of two or three meetings with the Spanish team. And you know, there's usually a dozen of them there. And and I mean, it's a general, it's not just a meeting with me, it's a GENERAL team meeting. You know, the [?]. And of COURSE it's in English you know and and you know it it it it clearly is, I think now becoming quite a case that academics around the world need to acquire English for you know to to, to work in [?]-, I mean, I'm sure it's not the same in every country, you know, but you know, certainly I think China seems to be uh, you know like like that. So anyway, just to those of few few thoughts, so you know ASK me your questions.

Researcher  
Well, I was having a bit of a snoop around the Internet and yesterday in the archives ((laughing)).

[P16]  
Oh ((raising eyebrows)). Wow.

Researcher  
Yeah. Um so I found the evaluation board, the [name of evaluation board] that you were ON, and now the the years I find you on the Internet was from [200X-20XX]. Is that right?

[P16]  
That sounds about right, yeah.

Researcher  
OK, so umm I was wondering just to start off of to warm up a bit if you could tell me something about how you came to be ON that [name of evaluation board] at that time.

[P16]  
Good question. Good question that and I I've been trying to remember myself, you know? So I I I I can't give you a direct, you know, answer you know, OTHER than to say that you know my, you know, in in my sort of PREVIOUS life at the [UK university], I ran the [unit on subject area]. We did a LOT of international work and a lot of European work. And and and you know, lots of projects, conferences etcetera, etcetera. And and I think it was probably just that I was you know pretty well CONNECTED you know that that, that you know a lot, a lot of people KNEW me. I mean I, I mean, I didn't I don't think of any specific things that I had been doing, you know, in AUSTRIA, although they MIGHT have been a part of project, but I THINK they just related, you know, to my general networking across European higher education.

Researcher  
Right, yeah, so um do you recall, I mean, so this was around about [#] years you were on this board with TWO other people, weren't you? There was um, WHO was there? There was [name] from [name of European university].

[P16]

Yeah

Researcher:

And [name], yeah?

[P16]

((nodding))

Researcher  
Yeah. Do you recall these people ((laughing))?

[P16]  
Yes, well just just about, yeah ((smiling)).

Researcher  
So during those [#] years uh what what WAS it actually that you EVALUATED?

[P16]

Yeah, no, good question, because I, I I mean I THINK it was more sort of RESEARCH projects than you know the the teaching and function[?]. And I think it was a mixture of PROPOSALS coming from WITHIN the university for you know developing research projects or research teams and things. So it was it was a sort of evaluation exercise for THAT, on the whole, as as as far as I can, as far as I can remember.

Researcher  
That's interesting, because they also had, like, a [name of advisory board]. So I was wondering what the distinction was between the [name of advisory board] and the [name of evaluation board].

[P16]  
Yeah. Yeah. Well, yeah, I mean a good POINT. I mean I AGAIN, I do remember there was this other board but I didn't have any direct, you know contact, you know, WITH it. Um and and and as I SAY I I think the EVAL, I mean, just in terms of you know, the terminology probably sums it up is is that our task was to decide whether proposals were any GOOD or not really, you know ((smiling)).

Researcher  
So this was proposals for research projects.

[P16]  
Yeah.

Researcher  
Uh-huh. And within the university? So um.

[P16]  
Yes, it was WITHIN the university, now I mean, I I can't quite remember whether it was just um you know the work of the academics at the university, or whether there were some things that came from there was post, you know, doc- doctoral students or postgraduate postdoctoral students, you know as WELL. Um I mean, I DO remember, you know, there seemed to be, you know, quite a lot of DIVERSITY across [case study university], as you know, I guess one would expect really. But you know I CAN'T remember the details. I mean, I did, you know, have a look on my uh on the computer to see if I have any. And and funnily enough, um the the the only things that like the only TWO things I could find were forms for forms for me to fill in when I wanted the money ((laughing)).

Researcher  
Ohh I see right ((laughing)). Very important. So um-

[P16]  
Well, incidentally, they they they you know the meetings, you know in those days it DID involve trips to [city].

Researcher  
That's very nice, yeah.

[P16]  
That was good. Yeah. When the world was different, you know?

Researcher  
Yeah, yeah, um so, do you recall that when you were evaluating these proposals. Umm did you make, did you just score them or did you make any decisions YOURSELF? Or were did you evaluate and then pass on the evaluation to the [name of governance body] or whatever and THEY then made the ultimate decision of whether.

[P16]  
Yeah, I think you might have been that really, that that we we would make a judgment about the strengths, the weaknesses, the whole balance, you know of it and um probably ultimately made a recommendation, you know, but the the actual ULTIMATE decision about yes or no would would then be in the other.

Researcher  
And and that would be about whether the projects would get funding from the university to go ahead.

[P16]

Yes, yeah.

Researcher

So about INTERNAL funding rather than, say, EUROPEAN funding or national funding.

[P16]

WelI, I think actually it might have been BOTH in the sense of would it be then submitted. You know, just I think the funding sources could be [?].

Researcher  
And obviously YOU were on the board as well as two German speakers, but the proposals must have been in ENGLISH then for you to evaluate them.

[P16]  
Yeah, that’s right. Everything was in English, yeah.

Researcher  
Yeah, does, does. Umm, do you know whether the ACTUAL projects THEMSELVES had to be in English or ONLY the proposal? Do you remember?

[P16]  
I don't. I don't know about that directly. I THINK though, you know that probably quite a FEW of the projects were INTERNATIONAL in some sense, you know, which I think is one of the reasons why, you know, they brought together a you know a an international TEAM, you know, so that could direct it into um.

Researcher  
So it WOULD have involved research collaborators in other countries, other European or other countries as well.

[P16]  
Exactly. Yeah, yeah.

Researcher  
Right, right. Um so [year], so a change in RECTORSHIP from [name] to [name], [redacted identifying information], so that you had there were two rectors who had really good that long well got voted in again, I suppose they have [#] terms I guess each something that, anyway. So did you notice that there was any DIFFERENCE when it changed towards the end in the priorities? No it was the same, you don't?

[P16]  
I don't recall ((shaking head)), but you know that that is, that's memory. Don't, don't necessarily ((laughing)).

Researcher  
No. No, no, um obviously it didn't. The this evaluation board kind of seemed to have finished shortly after the, the start of the new rectorship where, whereas the [name] what was it called the [name of advisory board] popped up again ((laughing)), and they still have it to this DAY. So yeah. Maybe the distinction was, there wasn't a need for the distinction anymore, but you don't KNOW why this ended.

[P16]  
I I'm not aware of that.

Researcher  
Yeah, yeah, yeah. OK, so how about the historical context? Did he know any do you know anything about the historical context that would have LED to the implementation of this KIND of board in [year] in Austria? Anything about?

[P16]  
WELL, I mean, I think in in a in a WAY it just seemed to me to be part of just general developments across EUROPE in a sense and and, you know, I was, you know, I mean, it was, it was sort of funny, you know, in, in just in terms of you know, MY kind of working LIFE, I did get drawn in to all SORTS of things across Europe. You know when, when, when I was directing our [unit name].

And I think it was partly to partly just to do with you know the contacts that had been, you know I'd I'd you know, I'd MADE, but, you know, I mean I I mean, OK, there were some research projects, but I can you know remember examining a couple of doctoral students in Portugal, for example, um the might even have been something in [city] when, when I'm thinking about it, in fact, that that MIGHT have been the the starting point of of the the the [city] connection.

[P16]  
So. You know the the, yeah, I have a lot of experience and also, you know, work with [EU body] projects and have researched the [EU body], so you know that was a a period when I think there was a, you know, a LOT of you know, a lot of interaction and quite a lot of joint of of joint WORK. As I say, I mean MY you know links were really on the research side because that's what I DID, you know, so but but but equally you know, I am AWARE of and and in fact I mean I think I mentioned in my e-mail to you, you know, there was one you know of my [nationality] postgraduates you know and and one of her plans for her doctorate, was very much of focusing on you know in ENGLISH as the world language, you know, and almost distinguishing um, you know, English for the English, you know, and English for the WORLD, you know. Because I remember ONE interesting conversation I had with with, with, with the student. You know, I sort of came back from Ireland and so, you know, well of course you know the Scots can speak Scottish and the Welsh can speak you know Welsh, although how much they do it, I'm not quite sure you know. And and I think the you know, I got in, I mean, I I've got no second language skills at all, you know? I I did I DID do French at school but then forgot it as soon as I left the school ((laughing)).

Researcher  
Are you from, are you from [county]?

[P16]  
[County] the other side.

Researcher  
[County], sorry [county].

[P16]  
Yeah, yeah ((laughing)).

Researcher  
I I don't know why now[?] [county] prop- popped into my mind. I I did have [city] in my mind. Did you did you work there at some point?

[P16]  
Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's right.

Researcher

Yeah. OK. So obviously [city] is in [county]. So I don't know if the the whole [county] thing right, yeah ((laughing)). Um I guess, yeah, that was actually what you're talking about NOW is my next question really, which was, you know, was this a reflection of a WIDER shift in the European higher education landscape towards kind of evaluation of research, for example, or quality assurance?

[P16]  
((nodding))

Researcher  
Uh, so I mean, you're saying that there was a certain, I mean, you've mentioned that there was a a trend towards greater collaboration between different European countries.

[P16]

Yes, yeah ((nodding))

Researcher

And and did that have an effect on HOW people were going about DOING research or EVALUATING research or guaranteeing quality?

[P16]  
Yeah, I think it DID. And I mean something which I I’ll just mention which I think is quite a you know, a GOOD example here. I mean when I have my [unit] in the [UK university] I mean, in fact, this was MORE or less, you know, probably in in our last year we DID actually have a uh SPANISH researcher working with us, young Spanish woman. Very, very interesting actually, and and she and you know, I often remember many interesting conversations we had, but I won't drift into them into them all, but I remember her EXPLAINING, you know, to me that you know, in a way WHY she was here, was that well, you know. If you you I mean she went through a sort of WHAT you needed to do in Spain to get an ac- to have an academic career.

And she went through a ticking off the the list and one was, you know, to um have you know, six months at least, you know, in a in another country, preferably an ENGLISH speaking you know country. So in a way uh her uhmm her period, you know with with me and in England was part of, you know, the Spanish route into academic life.

Researcher  
Right, yeah. Umm, how about the influences from the EU? Because you're, you know, your BIO at the TIME you were at the university, well, serving on this board for [case study university], your linked bio at that time it mentioned that you had directed projects for the [EU body]. So were there any influences from the E- level EU level into the type of work you were doing, say while you were on the evaluation board?

[P16]  
Probably. I mean, you know the the AGAIN there was a period you know it's so long ago and I can’t, you know I can't remember the details um, but there were quite a few and EU things that I got INVOLVED in and and you know, actually it visited the the [EU body] itself, a few, you know a few times. Um and you know, AGAIN, you know, these were things which it was no sort of great plan on MY part. It was just that the invitations CAME, you know? And and so um I I I I I said YES. So I mean there could WELL have been a you know a a a connection.

And you know, I mean actually, you know, our conversation is in a sense, REMINDING me how much, in that period, how much of my life WAS around Europe, you know. And and then and then, you know, in THOSE days you actually WENT places rather than just, you know, on the on the Internet.

Researcher  
Yeah, yeah. So, sorry, when you said that you mentioned that a visit to the [EU body], you meant with [case study university] as part of the Advisory Board, no?

[P16]  
No, no, I don't. I don't. I don't. No, I don't think it was connected with that ((shaking head)).

Researcher  
OK. Right, right. So that was your-

[P16]  
I don't know exactly what what it was.

Researcher  
Oh, I see. OK, sorry.

[P16]  
I mean, I can I, I'll just tell you the one thing I REMEMBER about it, which isn't TERRIBLY relevant, but I just thought it was quite funny actually. Um that ONE of the people you know who worked for the [EU body] and I was in his room, and he had um, he BASICALLY had a MAP of Europe. And then you know, LINKED to that, there were little, well, yes, the there was this IMAGINARY policy right of of the European Union, which would assign a particular ASPECT of life for one country to be in charge of. So I remember you you know the the, the, the, the two that I remember was that Italy would be responsible for POLICING across Europe and and Britain would be responsible for FOOD across Europe. And of course, these were produced, you know, on the assumption that well we all know we can't trust Italian police, and we all know how terrible the British are with with their food, you know, so that they they would be, they would be in charge, you know. But this was this wasn't REAL stuff, of course, you know, this is just EU fantasy, you know ((laughing))?

Researcher  
((laughing)) But I mean, as as you were on this evaluation board, you said that the proposals you GOT weren't just were also to do with the European collaborations as well. So there MIGHT have been proposals for EU funding, I suppose?

[P16]  
Ohh yes, I mean that that could certainly be could be a be a possibility.

Researcher  
How about the OECD? So your BIO at the time also mentioned that you [redacted identifying information]? So do you think there was any influence from the OECD to the EU level from your experience?

[P16]  
NOT directly, I don't think, although having said that, I think MOST of my [name] projects you know was WERE specifically European and and and so in a WAY, it was the same, it was the same networks. But I I DON'T particularly recall you know a direct connect- connection.

Researcher  
I mean ONE thing that's interesting is that the OECD subject classifications are used, aren't they within the EU? So the DISCIPLINE classifications, so when even in Austria, when they're compiling, so for example, the Austrian ministry compiles statistics um ON universities, they will use the OECD subject classifications for those statistics. And I think they're also used for things like rankings or whatever. So I guess you have the the wider influence of the OECD onto the European level also through the way that SUBJECT knowledge and DOMAINS of knowledge are classified?

[P16]  
Yeah yeah. I THINK so. And I mean, it's interesting that you mentioned that. I mean umm I mean another project which I'm just FINISHING actually, which is [name of organisation] funded, but it's a comparison of Britain and [European country] with, on the topic of [subject area] um and, ALTHOUGH in you know, the those two countries quite a BIT of time you know was spent at looking at national you know sort of statements, and in fact I found it was INTERESTING how much um you know publications from OECD about [subject area]. Um I mean quite HONESTLY, OEC- well, I LIKED the OECD ones, you know MORE, um but there were plenty from UNESCO as well, you know? And and in a LOT of detail, you know, and um you know, the that that sort of that kind of FRAMING and and and you know, it’s sort of making me wonder umm, how much well, to some extent, how much in Britain we possibly IGNORE those larger you know frame- frameworks. But yeah.

Researcher  
So how did they, can you can you give an example like for the OECD? How did they frame [subject area] or ways that um I guess, are you talking about how academics get recognition for the work they do or?

[P16]  
No, I mean this, this, I mean this would be you know on [subject area], you know, in teaching for students. Um it would be um and I mean that is quite a strong development NOW you know and indeed, I mean, in Britain as WELL, and in, you know it it, I mean [subject area], BASICALLY [subject] are [definition of subject]. [Redacted identifying information]

Researcher  
Get a [type of qualification] ((laughing)).

[P16]  
Yeah, get a [type of qualification], exactly ((smiling)).

[P16]  
And um the the, but the the OTHER the other side of it, which I found was interesting, certainly in the British context, um HUGE numbers of people were studying for [subject area], um but the majority of them already HAD degrees. A lot of them already have master’s degrees, so in fact it it it it, it was kind of something different. The other thing I would just like just say though, which is possibly relevant. Some of the work that I've done, and in particular for UNESCO, they did a a project entitled [name of project].

And the learning pathways could in principle enable to students to cross subject boundaries, cross institutional boundaries, but also cross NATIONAL boundaries, and you know so, so so, and it and it DOES seem to me you know that in quite a LOT of countries that going international is becoming a more and more central part of higher education.

You know, I I've I find the the debates in the UK are often SO much about how useful it is to have all these international students here because of the money they bring in, and they, you know, and ra-whereas to me, there are, you know, OK, money is important, I know, but I think there is a lot ELSE that is, you know that that that that that that, that that that is going on, and I mean coming back you know to your project you know the issue of well, what are the IMPLICATIONS of the use of English in terms of you know, they the lives of these students, you know, when, when, when, when, when they when they when they finished their, their higher education, you know. Are they going to be using English language, you know, for the rest of their lives, you know, WHERE will they be using it? What will they be, you know what will be the context of it? You know, I think the these these are quite you know, quite interesting TIMES really in in that. And indeed the the the the the whole globalization in a sense. Just another little, you know, quote I can give you um my [personal relation] is actually from [European country] and she once went to a lecture in London being given by a a quite famous [nationality] philosopher, [name]. And the thing that she told me he had to say, and this was a few months after the referendum on Britain leaving the European Union. [Name] you know said in his in his presentation in London, you know he was saying, oh don't get excited about it, you know. It's neither good or bad. It doesn't really matter because quite honestly, nation states don't matter that much anymore. You know, we're in a globalized world, a globalized economy. Um, you know, don't bother about the NATIONS, you know. And I think you can, you know, and and and then I think the the question of you know the ROLE of English language you know the the the um and you know, and WHEN it's used and and you know it's it's it, it is a it becomes a WAY of you know CROSS-border communication you know of people you know from different LANGUAGES, you know. English is the one we used to communicate across the BOARD.

Researcher  
Um yeah, YEAH, I mean, it IS used a lot as a lingua franca.

[P16]  
Yeah.

Researcher  
Obviously that those are, there's a strong DRIVING force behind it, but then there are also political um kind of decision making factors that come into the use of English language, yeah.

[P16]

Oh yeah. [?] Yeah.

Researcher  
Yeah. So, I mean, you mentioned when you were talking that in the UK, you get the sense that internationalization people often think in terms of well it's GREAT to have international students because they bring lots of money, bring in lots of money. And I think you were implicitly differentiating it from Europe perhaps? I got the impression perhaps you were in- implying there was a different kind of discourse in Europe? So is that true? Do you think that internationalization is seen in a different way from your experience of your work in Europe?

[P16]  
Well, I think the money is still THERE, but I think as well you know it is about you know, GLOBALIZING economies, you know, for, for, for you know, for example, you know, and that, you know, companies, organizations, you know, based in different countries if they're wanting to go global, then actually having staff who have English language, you know is is just, you know, part of the you know, part of the company's plan, you know, as a as, as, as essentially.

Researcher

I mean, it sounds from the way you're talking about it as if you see the European kind of discourse as more OUTWARD looking and the Britain, British discourse has more INWARD looking in terms of ATTRACTING internationals towards us, international students, but or is it just in in terms of how it's a money making enterprise as WELL in in terms of the system difference?

[P16]  
Well, I think it's the money there's the money making enterprise. I have to say though, you know and and maybe you know I'm I'm being a bit crude here, you know, but I DO sometimes think you know AGAIN, you know, coming, you know, into the sort of British politics and, you know, hearing the Boris Johnsons of this world, you know, in particular, that in a WAY, you know, in the mindsets you know, of you know the British elite, the British Empire has not actually disappeared, you know, and you know, so you know the linkages around the world of English speaking countries, you know, and and and and, you know, in a WAY, I think they the the political aspects of leaving Europe was that, ohh, you know, we'll be free to you know, work in our traditional British imperial ways. And INDEED you know when you hear now about things that are happening, it's often, you know, the sort of you know links to Australia, links to Canada and and and and and and and and so on.

Researcher  
Yeah. Sorry my my last question really is you know if if you, I mean, you've worked obviously in a lot of advisory capacities and have worked on loads of projects and across countries and I'm wondering if if you feel like any of the priorities of universities seem to have changed since you started doing this kind of work. So for example since [2000s], let's take [city] as a starting point. Do you think that between [2000s] and say NOW that the priorities have CHANGED in any way?

[P16]  
Well. It's it's it IS difficult to to generalize, I guess. Um I DO I think tend to find that in some ways Britain is possibly a bit different, you know, and and and I think you know, in Britain what we’ve seen, and it's to DO, I think with the EXPANSION of higher education um it's very much sort of focused on the vocational function of training the workforce, you know, and and that's, but that's what it's about, you know? And you know you you assess the quality in terms of, are the graduates getting good jobs, for example, you know. And and and I don't GET that sense you know from, you know, the work a lot of the INTERNATIONAL work that I've I've done, I mean that is obviously there, you know as WELL. And and of course you know in, in, in some countries you have quite diversified higher education SYSTEMS, you know, actually you have universities doing ONE sort of thing and then some other institutions doing OTHER sorts of things. So I mean, I think that DEFINITELY, you know, higher education is changing but you know, there is still, I think, quite a bit of of DIVERSITY across across the system.

I mean, one of the things which I would say IS a bit different, AGAIN, comparing Britain and and other European countries is that I think in Britain it's still the case that individual institutions have quite a lot of AUTONOMY in terms of what they do and how they do it.

In FACT, I mean the the, the, I mean that that's come out in my in my [European country], Britain thing on on on [research area] because you know the context from [European country], you know, was WHAT could they learn from Britain you know it for developing the [research area].

And well, in fact, I've said sometimes, you know within the project, you know, in terms of it being useful to [European country]. It could be you know, there's there's, you know, the good practices you can, you know learn, but we ALSO need to have a category of things to AVOID, you know, sort of, you know, that the learning what NOT to do. And certainly I think one of the things which is quite DIFFICULT in the British system is for students to move between INSTITUTIONS. And I think there's there's two main reasons, you know, for that. You know ONE is that you know, universities are not, you know, don't don't WANT to lose anybody you know, part of the funding.

And then, but the OTHER thing is because universities have quite a lot of autonomy about their curriculum. You know, doing ONE year in ONE university and then wanting to transfer to a DIFFERENT university, you you've not, you're in the second year. You know you you may well, it's quite likely that you won't have done the right FIRST year education to get into the SECOND year education and the difference, so in fact there isn't that much MOVEMENT, you know between between institutions in Britain.

Whereas you know I I got the impression that in in some OTHER countries, well, basically MORE things were decided by the STATE, you know, and that meant that there was less difference between the educational experience at the different universities.

Researcher  
And so we what countries, for example, do you mean [European country] or other countries?

[P16]  
Well, yeah, I mean, I'm not thinking particularly, you know of [European country] but I think you know GENERALLY with with pro- projects. I mean I've done a NUMBER of projects, I mean, quite long time ago now, on graduate employment in different countries. And ONE of the, you know, one of the definite DIFFERENCES when you were comparing, so you know these would be SURVEYS of graduates, you know, a few years after they'd left higher education.

And what they did, you know, what, you know what jobs they got where they got them and all those sorts of things. Um but I I always remember, you know, my BIG conclusion from the data, was that WHEREAS in most European countries WHAT you had studied was the key dimension to the work you would subsequently get, whereas in BRITAIN it was much more WHERE you had studied rather than WHAT you had studied. In other words, our stratified system, you know that that you know it doesn't matter much what you studied if you went to [UK university] or [UK university], and then you're going to be, you know, you know, well, well, well set up um so it it was WHAT you had studied and the DISTINCTIVENESS of individual universities in terms of their reputation, which was, which is quite KEY in terms of the role of universities in British society. Whereas in some OTHER countries, it it was very much, you know about WHAT you had studied and to SOME extent there would be more national control over what universities were offering, so that it it wasn't so crucial um to study, you know, at any particular place.

Although you know I don't want to OVER emphasize that you know, because umm AGAIN with with the with the INTERNATIONAL, you know students. I mean I can AGAIN, I can remember projects where I was hearing umm then again in Europe can't even remember now the, you know what's what's the capital of [European country]?

Researcher  
[European country].

[P16]

Is is it is it is [city] or? Well, um anyway, the, the, the, the point was, you know, on on the, I think this MIGHT have been a [EU body] project that was I was doing. And what we will basically hearing you know in in [country], you know was that you know for the for the RELATIVELY wealthy, privileged and ambitious, you know families, you wanted your children to either GO to the MAIN university in the capital city, and if you couldn't get in there, go INTERNATIONAL.

Researcher  
OK.

[P16]  
You know, so, so, you know, like, you know, there are about, you know, sort of [#] or [#] universities and uh in [country], you know. But the message was if you don't go to the TOP university, then you go international, you know, and and you know, with which I thought was quite interesting really.

Researcher  
Hmm. Right, right. And that was like a STATUS thing, was it?

[P16]  
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Researcher  
So, but the I mean does the status, how does that connect, how does that tie in with the autonomy? Because you'd mentioned BEFORE, you felt that it had a relationship with autonomy.

[P16]  
WELL, I mean. Yeah. No, it it's, yeah, though you're, you're, you're right to ask you know that. Umm I mean autonomy, you know, is you know means that the the standard rules that you follow, you've got more flexibility, you know, so it does enable universities to be more DIFFERENT. But that of itself doesn't necessarily uh, you can still have differences which are state CONTROLLED in the in the in the in the in the way in terms of you know ARE institutions doing what they WANT to do or are they doing what they are REQUIRED to do you know, and again THERE you know the, the, the, the stratification, I mean I mean in terms of you know kind of coming back to [country], you know whether this, you know status focus you know of of the capital city university, you know, WAS a sort of you know, was was was that PART of you know the government's policy you know that, you know, we we do need to have one TOP university you know with which you know will be the the higher education you know, for for the elite as it were, you know, and and you know that that's that's what we do need to to protect. Whereas you know, I think you know, I think countries DIFFER in that respect and you know, I I I think, you know, I DON'T really get the sense that OTHER European countries are particularly like that. You know, there is there, there are differences, you know, but it but it's it's it's less HIERARCHICAL I think than BRITAIN is and and and some others as WELL.

Researcher  
Yeah, I guess I'm just you know, wondering because you did mention that in Britain we also have stratification, but we ALSO have high levels of autonomy.

[P16]  
Yes.

Researcher  
Whereas there whereas in another place they have lower levels of autonomy, but also have stratifications. So I was wondering about the relationship between autonomy and, you know, stratification or status.

[P16]  
Yeah, well, possibly they’re separate issues really, but you could still have differences you know in, in, in, in terms of who goes WHERE to study WHAT you know and that that isn't something necessarily you know that governments can, can, you know, can can control. And you know, the, the, the umm, I mean, on the WHOLE, you know, I think I think uh, it's it's it's it's a DIFFICULT one that you know, I think there's a mixture of ALL of these things, you know and not you know, necessarily the case. I mean you know, I've got [redacted identifying information].

Researcher  
Yeah. Yeah. So um thanks so much again for your time. Is there anything I I haven't given a chance to talk about that you would like to mention?

[P16]  
Well, you know, not really. I mean I I think I do, you know kind of you know mention in my message the interest that these Chinese, you know, two or three of these Chinese postgraduates have in English language, you know, and you know HOW it is used and WHY it's important and and and and how it actually, you know kind of operates you know. So I mean that you know for the INTERNATIONAL students. And and I would just say that one of the things I found interesting with the Chinese students is that typically they are in Britain in such large numbers, you know. And in fact my [personal relation] says that about 40% of the students at [UK university] are from CHINA. Uh, and one of the consequences of that, of course, is that they actually don't need to speak English all that much because, you know, they're spending their lives together, you know, still using Chinese or whatever, you know, the native language IS. So I think, you know, the the issues of of how it's, how it’s USED, WHO you talk to, you know the SOCIAL aspect of higher education. You know who you know, who do you make FRIENDS with, who who do you, that ACTUALLY the the language factor you know is quite IMPORTANT for that.

Researcher  
Umm, yeah. I mean, there's a lot of talk now at European universities also about, well NOT only European universities, but internationalization at HOME, so how you kind of internationalize the curriculum within a kind of an expanded sense of the curriculum? Umm, yeah, so it's definitely something that is kind of discussed in terms of the the WHOLE university environment and not just the classroom as well.

[P16]  
Well, that's right. That's right. You know, I mean, it was maybe one of the things I found interesting you know about my [relation’s] [UK university] experience is, you know, he's studying [subject area], but the FRIENDS he's made are not other students studying [subject area]. And THAT is really a PANDEMIC effect, because in his FIRST year um basically, although the university was open, teaching was online. So the friends you made were in the Hall of residence where he was living, and they could be studying ANYTHING, you know. So in fact, the higher education experience was not a distinctive SUBJECT experience for him, but something which was much, much, much WIDER, you know, and and I think, you know, the, the the, you know, universities do DIFFER in these sorts of sorts of things.

Researcher  
Yeah.

[P16]

I mean as as we know, I mean I I've you know we're talking [?] in [UK university], I I have been associated with [UK university] for quite a while, but I'm still a [role]. But I mean the [unit], it's a little bit building on the road all on its own, you know.

Researcher

Alright.

[P16]

You know.

Researcher

Alright, yeah.

[Redacted identifying information]

[P16]

Exactly.

Researcher  
Anyway, thanks again so much for taking the time to participate. Yeah, it's been great to have your input.

[P16]  
OK, I hope it was of some use.

Researcher  
Yeah. No, it's great. Thank you. So good to get different different perspectives from different people involved. You know, obviously in different areas as well. So thank you so much.

[P16]

You’re welcome.

Researcher

Thank you. Bye then. Bye.

[P16]

Bye bye.